

UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

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My name is Allison Joslyn and I am a project manager at the Center for Social Research at the University of Hartford. At the Center for Social Research, I have worked on the evaluation of Nurturing Families Network and Help Me Grow programs, as well as the Family School Connection program. I am here to speak on behalf of the Family School Connection program administered by the Office of Early Childhood.

As you know, chronic absenteeism in early childhood education is an early warning sign of multiple stressors in the home, inadequate parental engagement, and is associated with school dropout and other poor outcomes, such as a delays in reading. These early warning signs of dropping out of school are established by the first grade (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

The Family School Connection program aims to challenge the problem of truancy and chronic absences by providing home visitation and support services to connect families to their community and school. The program targets those for having chronic absences, truancy, behavioral and academic issues. During the fiscal year 2015, 10% of all referrals were of children whom were truant and over 7% of all referrals had excessive excused absences. Also, over 6% of children were chronically tardy in the schools. Often times, these families need reliable resources to meet their basic needs.

- Of those that ultimately join the program in 2015, 41% were struggling with unmet basic needs, 37% of parents were struggling with unstable housing or homelessness, 37% were struggling to address their child's behavior or mental health issues, and 29% of parents were struggling to address their child's academic problems.

Home visitors provide evidence-based services to families with complex stories. We find that participating families stay in the program for an average of 18 months where they receive support and resources in the community, are

offered practical strategies in parenting to support their children in schools, and build strong healthy partnerships with their children's teachers.

Furthermore, in a review of the current literature, Wilder (2014) found that school, family and community partnership is positively associated with academic progress and is consistent across different grade levels and ethnic groups. Parent participation in their child's education is an integral part of self-efficacy and responsibility for promoting learning skills in the young child (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006). Family and community partnerships affects student's learning and development (Epstein, 2001; Sheldon, 2003).

Family School Connections has established a comprehensive infrastructure in research data collection on outcome related measures. For instance, our research findings show that parents who participate in the program for six months, one year, and two years made significant improvements on the rigidity subscale, indicating parents who have less rigid expectations of their children are less likely to treat their children forcefully.

There are many barriers that families learn to overcome through home visiting services. FSC parents/caregivers made significant gains in their knowledge and use of community resources at six months, one year and two years of program participation.

- Specifically, parents made improvements in basic skills in: locating a bus stop or finding reliable transportation; budgeting, such as being able to pay bills and having a bank account; families have a personal contact they can rely on, and know how to obtain needed services; and they make improvements in keeping up with current events.

I want to remind you that Connecticut wants all children to grow up in a stable living environment, safe, healthy, and prepared to lead successful lives. Families make progress participating in home visiting services. As you listen to the voices of the families receiving this resource and hear from pivotal staff that help behavior change occur, I ask you to think about our next generation's future. Children perform better when the parent is involved and when the parent believes in him or herself to support their child.